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SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

CONFERENCE ON

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Memphis, Tennessee
June 7-8, 1955

On June 7 and 8 representatives of 23 Land-Grant Colleges and Universities and of the U. S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, and Health, Education and Welfare met in conference at Memphis, Tennessee to consider possible ways and means of furthering constructive rural development programs in agricultural areas characterized by relatively low farm family incomes.

The three committee reports included in this summary encompass fairly adequately the conference considerations relative to approaches deemed essential to insure effective progress. No attempt is made herein to review considerations of the nature of the problems involved. These have been well summarized in the United States Department of Agriculture report "Development of Agriculture's Human Resources." This report was, in fact, the point of departure for the conference deliberations.

These committee reports merely reflect a general consensus of the conference group at the time of the conference. They do not constitute an official plan of action. However, they do provide an excellent base for the development of more specific plans as circumstances make possible more definitive action than is now under way through previously established programs of service.

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REPORT OF WORK GROUP 1

ORGANIZING FOR ACTION

Preamble - We recognize the extent and nature of the problems to be encompassed as defined by President Eisenhower in his message to Congress on "Development of Agriculture's Human Resources" and as further delineated by Secretary Benson and others, and as recorded in the report of the USDA on "Development of Agriculture's Human Resources."

Extension and other agencies are now working to a limited extent with low-income farm families--both those who are in full-time farming and also part-time operators. It is recognized that increased and more intensive work in serious problem areas, and the necessity for bringing in assistance from all agencies that can contribute to a solution of the problems involved, is desirable, and offers the means of cooperation with the families in these areas to improve the local situation and that of the individuals concerned.

It is felt that this work should be continued; also that there is a need to use selected counties in which to intensify and develop the most practical procedures and methods for a solution of the general problem. To this end, this conference has developed some suggestions which it believes can be useful in this type of program when such can properly be put into effect in a limited number of counties.

Turning to the first sub-heading -- Leadership--county, State and Federal. The committee that worked on this has suggested the following with respect to Federal leadership. It recognized the fact that already at the Federal level leadership is being given in the institution of this effort. The committee assumed that the 2 committees now in existence, working and operating under the direction of Under Secretary Morse, would continue in its advisory capacity.

With respect to State leadership the committee made some rather specific suggestions that would seem to be fairly applicable in most any State regardless of the operational details finally determined on a local basis. It is suggested that each State should establish a State advisory committee dealing with this particular problem of rural development. This committee should, as a minimum, include representatives of those different agencies which are in the business of servicing agriculture. The functions of this State committee, for the most part, would be advising the several agency groups involved and coordinating their efforts better to attain a common objective. Each agency involved would, of course, retain the responsibility for the operation of its own program through its usual normal channels of command.

The question was raised: "Who should take the initiative in getting the ball rolling at the State level." The committee believes that the Dean of the School of Agriculture of the land-grant college or university, or such other individual at the college to whom the directors of extension and the experiment station report, should take this initiative. In order to start things moving

he might call together first of all representatives of those agencies or organizations that have a definite contribution to offer. In most instances this would include at least the following agencies: the Extension Service, the Agricultural Experiment Station, the Soil Conservation Service, Vocational Education, ASC, Farmers Home Administration, the Farm Credit Administration, and the State Department of Agriculture. It is further suggested that at the first meeting they elect their own officers from among their own number and expand membership to include other groups and organizations that they feel should be represented.

The suggestion is made that the determination of leadership at the county level might very well become a function of this State advisory committee, and that they might be permitted to prescribe the manner in which the county advisory committee should be organized. They might even wish to suggest or experiment with several different organizational patterns at the county level.

As to what individual or agency should take the initiative at the county level again might very well be a decision of the State committee.

The second sub-heading had to do with suggested plan of operation within a county. There would seem to be virtually no end to the sort of suggestions that could be made in this regard. Rather than to get involved in too many detailed suggestions the committee has taken the broader view and offers these suggestions:

There should be some agreement as to the kind and amount of help needed at the county level to do the job. The thought was expressed that if we did not receive some additional resources to carry on a rural development program it would simply have the effect of piling on top of already busy schedules an additional activity. Further, that we should not try to pawn off as a real effort in the direction of a rural development program such limited efforts as might be possible within current resources that might be of a rather feeble nature.

This particular subcommittee assumed for discussion purposes that the State group had already designated someone at the county level, possibly the county agricultural agent, to take the initiative in bringing together local people; that he had been properly informed as to the nature of the program and the need for it; and that there would be additional help to carry on such an undertaking. Then this leadership at the county level would arrange for a county meeting of local agencies and groups. This would vary from county to county. At this meeting someone from the State level, presumably a member of the State committee, would discuss very thoroughly the over-all program, answer questions, and obtain from this local group an expression of interest--or lack of interest if that should be the result. If there was active interest they could move immediately into the problem of what to do, what we need to know about the local area that we may use as a basis for further planning of our rural development activities, and move off from that point.

At subsequent meetings they might very well concern themselves with the functional organization of the local committee, establishment of a steering committee and appropriate subcommittees, and begin the study and planning activities which would expand participation in the rural development program out to the various communities within that particular county.

With respect to the third sub-heading -- coordinating efforts of all concerned -- the subcommittee assumed that at the State level there would be an advisory committee, and that one of the functions of members of the State advisory committee would be that of assisting in the organizational and operational functions of the county groups. They asked themselves, first of all, who is it that might be involved in this problem of coordination? They listed a rather sizable number of governmental agencies -- Federal, State and local -- civic groups, farm organizations, urban groups, and professional organizations that might very well have a real interest in the furtherance of the objectives of a rural development activity. Rather than spelling out in great detail the actual mechanics of coordination, the committee preferred to set forth a few basic concepts which would help a great deal in achieving better coordination. One of these is the concept that the local people themselves should take the initiative in making the decisions that need to be made.

Secondly, that the agency people should make every effort to fit their programs and their activities into the course of action determined by this local group. This is a sort of thing that we might think of as local orientation of a higher-up program, a State program or a Federal program. We have the same problem in our Extension Service--the idea that our specialist staff, our administrative staff, everyone other than the field workers, exist for the purpose of furthering the programs of the county as determined at the local level with local orientation.

Third, that somehow or another we should attempt to achieve at least a broad general understanding of the role of each one of the several agencies in carrying out its particular function with respect to a rural development effort. Implied there, of course, is a recognition of the fact that there certainly is some overlapping of functions and activities, and that the sooner there is general recognition of this fact the better are your chances of achieving real coordination of effort. There may be some vacuums also in terms of coverage and activities that likewise should be recognized and considered as a problem that in some way or another will have to be met.

Extent and nature of problems to be encompassed: We recognized that this subject can be interpreted in a number of different ways. It might be interpreted as the extent and nature of the problems of the low-income families themselves. However, it seemed to us that the problems of the low-income families had been rather adequately discussed in the printed report. We concluded, therefore, that we should emphasize the problems of operation, organization, functions, and that sort of thing.

This committee recognizes the following problems in getting organized for successful work in this field:

1. Deciding upon who is going to take the lead in this work and getting acceptance of this leadership.
2. A very real problem is that of getting adequately qualified personnel to provide the active leadership in carrying out the work.
3. Getting more nearly adequate information regarding the local situation, the problems involved, and explicit subject-matter information directly applicable to the problems of the low-income farm families.

4. Getting all agencies, groups, and individuals who are in a position to contribute to such a program interested, adequately informed, and effectively cooperating.
5. Getting agreement among all concerned as to the best potential areas for carrying on this particular emphasis.
6. Enlisting and activating the interest and the participation of the local people.
7. Clarification of the responsibilities of everyone concerned.
8. Establishing criteria for the selection of experimental counties. One of our subcommittees suggested that this might be a function of the State group.
9. Locating and enlisting the help of local lay leadership.
10. Obtaining adequate and specific information relative to both on-farm and off-farm alternative income opportunities.
11. Relating such experimental programs to other programs already under way, such as farm and home development. There seems to be a variation of concepts with respect to this particular point.
12. Insuring that too much or improper credit does not become an assumed panacea for families in this category where there is no possibility of developing adequate economic units.
13. Insuring that there is an adequate appreciation that to make real progress additional resources will be required in addition to those that are now available.

REPORT OF WORK GROUP 2

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED AND STEPS NECESSARY
TO INSURE ITS AVAILABILITY

The implication in this assignment was that our group was to deal with the "research" aspects of the problem. This was understood, but at the same time it was early recognized in the discussion that the implication involved more than new research -- it involved a compilation and evaluation of past and current research as it might apply to specific areas and circumstances.

The group felt an obligation to promulgate some recommendations of a specific nature, and yet faced somewhat of a dilemma in the realization that because circumstances and problems will vary considerably in different areas, no set pattern of needs could be outlined which would apply in all cases.

During our discussion, the various recommendations incorporated in the USDA report entitled "Development of Agriculture's Human Resources," were considered. The group felt that all these recommendations had merit. The objections, if any, to some were that they were necessarily so general as to have little meaning until applied to specific problems and to particular locales.

Our group felt that its task would have been easier if it could have had the reports of the other groups before it as a basis for consideration. In other words, the matter boils down to the simple proposition that it is difficult to foresee the needs of additional information for application to a specific problem until that problem is delineated.

Nevertheless, during the discussion, some pertinent ideas were expressed which we felt should be recorded for the benefit of those who were not present. Outlined in brief form they may be summarized as follows:

1. The program of research in its contribution to the development of agriculture's human resources should not be simply descriptive; however, in the early stage a great deal of attention will likely be given to the collection of factual delineative data as a basis for future problem-solving studies.
2. At the outset it should be recognized that regardless of what areas are chosen for study, there will be great diversity between the areas and between individual farms within areas in the problems to be solved. This may require different researches and different approaches to the specific problems.
3. The desire for early accomplishment may make it wise to first apply what is already known as the beginning toward the goal of a more permanent program, but studies that of their very nature require time for solution should not be overlooked. In this connection it will be important to capitalize on past researches not aimed originally at this particular problem but which may have very important implications in the present situation. This includes current researches of a more general nature.

4. It is very important to determine precisely what researches are needed to supply the required information. The combined thinking of all cooperating agencies can be very helpful in this regard and should precede initiation of the research.
5. The difference from the conventional extension pattern lies in the fact that those farmers under consideration are those that are not as effectively reached in the regular extension programs. One important study should be to determine why they are not gaining from present programs; also, how these individuals can be reached effectively.
6. It seems important in this program to capitalize to the maximum on present local organizations and local interest for the leadership and stimulus required for these programs.
7. It will be necessary, once desirable alternatives have been established, to find the most effective way of presenting these choices to the farmers.
8. The small unit approach seems more desirable than attempting to study all problem areas simultaneously. Whether this will be entire counties, parts of counties or communities will vary with the nature of the local problems.
9. The specific studies eventually needed may not fall entirely within any particular area of interest such as agriculture, labor, commerce, or Farmers Home Administration. Each should accept responsibility for the contribution it can most effectively make in coordination with other interested groups.
10. The availability of appropriate and adequate credit may be an important phase of the solution to the problem but may likewise be an example of one of several services that are sometimes available but not used.
11. In studying specific cases it is hoped that much information may be transferrable to other areas; this might include, among others, such things as nationality characteristics and adaptable varieties of crops.
12. It may be important in the interest of objectivity to have disinterested agencies conduct some of the researches.
13. The committee agrees that its recommendations should be presented without consideration of the final number and specific location of the counties in which the studies will be made.
14. Provision should be made for the appropriate evaluation of progress made toward the eventual goals.

Following the general discussion, certain recommendations were selected as examples which might well apply to the majority of cases, regardless of locality and circumstances. Some of these originated during the group discussion and others are practically identical with those of the USDA report, but all are listed herein without distinction, for purposes of emphasis.

First, information should be developed in pilot areas to determine:

- a. Best paying intensive systems of farming, including actual studies of specific farm budget plans.
- b. Minimum sizes of farms of best paying types that will provide specified income levels.
- c. The capital, land and management requirements for the most promising systems of farming.
- d. In analyzing systems of farming that seem to promise income improvement it will be necessary to determine credit needs and to analyze the types of repayment schedules that can be met with the prospective year-by-year flow of income available for debt payment.
- e. The time required for shifting to improved systems of farming, the steps that need to be taken and the year-by-year income prospects.
- f. The possibilities of non-farm employment.
- g. The content of family living that can be provided with the income available from improved systems of farming and from non-farm employment.

Second, studies of market development potentialities for proposed increased production of commodities economically feasible in low-income areas.

Third, inventory of manpower in low-income areas with special attention to composition, skills, availability for employment within or outside of area, and attention to impediments to desirable mobility with a view toward improvement of programs of employment services or other appropriate agencies.

Fourth, research on the types of education received by rural youth -- general versus vocational, and within vocational programs whether agricultural or for non-agricultural occupations -- in relation to later migration and occupational adjustments, with a view to planning improved educational programs in rural areas with high population increase.

Fifth, research on availability and utilization of health facilities by rural families in low-income areas with particular attention to programs for extending farmers' participation in voluntary prepaid health insurance programs.

Sixth, studies of the social and economic efforts of extension of Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance to farmers and farm workers with particular attention to increasing participation in the program by older farm operators in low-income areas by educational and extension activities.

Seventh, the group was aware of the need for up-to-date information on soil types in the areas for intensive study, and where such up-to-date information is not available, cooperative soil surveys should be undertaken.

Eighth, at the appropriate time, research should be undertaken on development of new industries for rural areas.

REPORT OF WORK GROUP 3

STIMULATION OF LOCAL PRIVATE INITIATIVE

Part (a) - Civic clubs, churches, etc.

It was felt that it was necessary to deal with a part of the assignment of Group 1 -- an over-all plan for community-wide organization before it could specifically consider the place of civic clubs, churches and other organizations. The group considers the present trend of using the community approach a very desirable one.

Civic Clubs:

Civic clubs can contribute to the program in the following ways:

1. By helping to initiate community-wide organizations.
2. By helping to enlist interest and support on the part of business and civic leaders.
3. By carrying out specific assignments for the community-wide organization, such as sponsoring contests, youth activities, and so forth.

Churches:

Churches, more than any other institution, have very widespread contact and influence with the people of their communities. They are in a key position to give necessary sanction and support to programs designed to raise living standards. Normally, the real farm and home leaders are also active church leaders. Religious attitudes provide a dynamic force for community and personal improvement. Churches can contribute to this program by:

1. Cooperating with other agencies in the community.
2. Initiating special projects of their own, relating to the program, such as "Rural Life Sundays," and "4-H Club Sundays."
3. Sanctioning and supporting their ministers in influencing the thinking of members of their congregations.

Farm organizations:

For our purpose farm organizations are considered as private organizations. They can, and in some places do, support community development programs by furnishing leadership, talent and financial aid, and so forth. The resources of farm organizations should be guided into the support of this program. Such support can be a powerful force and should be sought and used.

Youth organizations:

Many youth organizations, other than 4-H Clubs, FFA Clubs, and so forth can contribute greatly to the guidance of the young men and women of an area. The Scouting program is a good example, and it and similar movements should be enlisted.

Other organizations:

There are many well-organized groups that can make real contributions to the success of a Rural Development Program. Among these are: Veterans' organizations, PTA, bankers' groups, and trade associations.

General: The above groups should be brought into the program in the early planning stage so as to make them an integral part of it from the very beginning.

Part (b) - Encouragement of Expansion of Local Industry

Although rural development programs emphasize agricultural improvement, they must include industrial, educational and recreational developments as well as those relating to health. Raising the farm income level requires increased off-farm employment opportunities in the community or people will migrate. Rural industries can provide off-farm employment yet not destroy family groups. Assistance in surveying the local potentialities and in establishing such industries can be obtained from many Federal and State agencies and from certain industrial and business associations.

Part (c) - Motivation of Individual Family Participation

Certain farm families in nearly every community are active in agricultural and homemaking programs. Generally, however, a large segment of the farm population does not participate in such programs. Many families have no formal contacts other than through their churches. They are best reached through networks of kinship and informal neighborly relations. To get widespread individual family participation, it is necessary to discover and work with the natural leaders in these networks. The confidence of these leaders on a personal basis must be secured.

Although these natural leaders are to be found in every community, their effectiveness can be increased by appropriate training programs.

The conversion of needs into desires is fundamental in motivation. This recognition of the existence of a need can be brought about best through demonstrations.

Opportunities for success on a small scale will lead to further participation. Recognition of accomplishment is one of the greatest incentives for future effort.





